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SUBJECT: Ma Ying-jeou's "Long Stay" Campaign in Southern Taiwan:
Early Indications

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REF: TAIPEI 2095

1. (U) Summary: KMT presidential candidate Ma Ying-jeou's "long stay" campaign strategy appears to be having a positive effect in south Taiwan, as indicated by recent opinion polls showing his approval rating increased by 5 percent following his recent long stay effort. Southern DPP party operatives acknowledge their own polling indicates Ma's long-stay drive has diminished the DPP's lead in this traditionally heavily "green" part of Taiwan. Ma apparently learned about and took to heart the political influence of underground radio stations in the south, for the KMT has started buying broadcast time from legal radio stations to counteract the anticipated negative impact underground stations will have on Ma's presidential campaign in the South. Ma's campaign aides in the south express optimism that his personal charisma, reinforced by his long stay campaign, will encourage swing voters and maybe even "light green" supporters to vote for him and the KMT. End Summary

2. (SBU) Ma Ying-jeou's senior election campaign advisor Dr. Steve Chan told AIT/K that Ma Ying-jeou's long stay project in southern Taiwan has been beneficial to his campaign there and has given Ma a better understanding of southern attitudes and of the depressed state of the economy in southern Taiwan. According to Chan, Ma's popularity increased by 5 percent after his recent long stay in southern Taiwan from August 9 to September 18. Chan noted that as he escorted Ma during his long stay project in southern Taiwan (covering brief periods in every major city and county), he came away convinced that many business people who had previously supported the DPP, appeared increasingly ready to switch and vote for the KMT out of disappointment over the Dip's poor economic performance. Chan also stressed the positive response Ma received from the general public and wide recognition from the "silent group" of centrist swing voters. (Bio note. Chan was President of Chi Mei Hospital in Tainan, where President Chen Shui-bian received emergency medical treatment for a gunshot wound during his 2004 election campaign. He served as Director of the Executive Yuan's Health Department in the 1990's. End Note.)

3. (SBU) According to Chan, the KMT is buying time slots from formerly underground, but now legal, radio stations in southern Taiwan to counteract underground radio stations that have served as mouthpieces for the DPP and earlier for the opposition movement in the 1970's and 1980's. Chan noted that some local radio stations have even offered to put on talk shows and advertise for the KMT free of charge because the radio station owners, as entrepreneurs, believe the KMT is the best hope for change and rescuing the southern Taiwan economy. On the other hand, some legal radio

stations have been unwilling to sell time to the KMT so as not to offend their major advertising clients in the south, including DPP candidates and party. Some of them have bluntly told the KMT that they do not expect to receive any KMT advertising following the 2008 presidential election campaign and do not want to jeopardize their long-term income stream for the few dollars they can earn during campaign season.

14. Chan told AIT/K that Ma was warmly received by local people during his "long stay" visits in southern Taiwan. This face-to-face contact, he said, was helping change people's impressions about Ma, who has long been viewed by southerners as born to a privileged KMT family. According to Chan, Ma made a number of campaign promises to boost economic development in southern Taiwan during his long stay in southern Taiwan, including cross-strait direct links, government funding for local infrastructure and financial assistance for local fishery, agriculture and traditional industries.

15. (SBU) According to Chan, Ma is planning to come back to southern Taiwan for another "long stay" campaign visit to further strengthen his ties with southern Taiwan. Chan said that during his meetings with various local professional groups he has discovered that southern Taiwan is no longer an exclusive DPP political stronghold. For example, some medical groups that have traditionally been deep green supporters have changed their views on Taiwan politics and their attitudes toward certain political parties. Chan attributed some of the credit for this shift to his own active efforts reaching out and speaking to large and small medical associations throughout the south, in particular explaining the KMT's proposed health care program. Chan did note, however, that the Frank Hsieh and Su Tseng-chang team will be formidable and that the DPP has the most

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disciplined politicians in Taiwan.

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16. (SBU) Separately, Central News Agency Reporter Cheng Chi-feng told AIT/K that he believed Ma's long stay campaign had helped him consolidate hardcore KMT voters and encourage swing voters, "light blue" (i.e., tending toward the KMT) or maybe even "light green" supporters to vote for him and the KMT. In southern Taiwan, he noted, light blue supporters and swing voters tend to be silent and politically apathetic, and usually do not vote. If these voters can be stimulated to go vote, he continued, Ma's chances of winning the presidential race will be greatly strengthened, since the KMT already has a larger voter base than the DPP in northern Taiwan. Taiwan Daily News reporter Tsui Chia-chi separately told AIT that Ma's long stay campaign is helping him in the south. Ma's effort to learn the Taiwanese language, moreover, is another plus in his election campaigning in southern Taiwan.

17. (SBU) In various meetings with DPP and KMT party operatives in Tainan and Kaohsiung (reftel), AIT/K learned that both DPP and KMT private opinion polls show Ma's long-stay campaign has eaten into DPP support in the South. In a recent meeting with former Chiayi mayor Chang Bo-ya (non-affiliated, but green leaning during her tenure) AIT/K learned that Chang, who is greatly disillusioned with the DPP, thinks Ma's short stay in Chiayi could have minimal effect.

Although she indicated she may personally support Ma's policies, she cannot declare public support for him in order to sway her grassroots supporters. She characterized her supporters as solidly green, indicating her public support for Ma would win her a lot of public criticism while Ma would gain no votes. Chiayi County's DPP and KMT party chairs agreed that Ma's one day visit to Chiayi had some small effect, but neither felt Ma could capture any significant votes in Chiayi unless the KMT wins one of the two LY seats in the upcoming legislative election. Neither the DPP nor KMT chairs expressed optimism about that outcome in Chiayi County.

18. (U) Comment: While DPP leaders publicly denigrate Ma's southern long stay campaign as "useless" and "a joke," privately they acknowledge concern that Ma's campaign appears to be increasing his popularity in southern Taiwan. For their part, KMT operatives appear more upbeat as their messages seem to be falling on fertile ground. End Comment.

Thiele

Young